22 ■ Plato's *Phaedo*

There is—as most of you probably know—what we call (in words derived from Latin and Greek) a legend or a myth or (in plain English) a tale according to which certain fabulous events occurred on the island of Crete and in Athens and between these two in the very ancient past. There are different versions of that complex story, but I shall limit myself to the following points.

First: Minos, the king of Crete, has a wife, Pasiphaë, and many children. Pasiphaë falls in love with a wonderful white bull. The famous craftsman Daedalus helps her in a most ingenious way to satisfy her desires. She gives birth to the Minotaur, a monster with a bull's head and a human body. The Minotaur's abode, constructed by Daedalus, is the Labyrinth, a large building consisting of numerous halls connected by intricate and tortuous passages.

Secondly: one of the sons of Minos, Androgeus, visits Athens. The king of Athens, Aegeus, fearing that Androgeus might persuade his father Minos to support a revolt in Athens, arranges an ambush that leads to the death of Androgeus. Many things happen after that. Finally Minos imposes a tribute on Athens:

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every ninth year the Athenians have to send seven young men and seven young women to Crete as a prey for the Minotaur.

Thirdly: when this tribute is due for the third time, the *son* of the Athenian king, *Theseus*, decides that *he* will go to Crete with those fourteen and will kill the Minotaur. He takes with him, as we can read in Plutarch's *Lives* (Theseus XXIII, 2), not seven, but nine young men, two of them having fresh and girlish faces, but possessed of an eager and manly spirit. These two have to dress and walk as if they were women. As soon as Theseus and the fourteen arrive in Crete, one of the daughters of Minos, *Ariadne*, falls in love with Theseus. She gives Theseus a ball of thread which has to be tied with its loose end to the door of the Labyrinth and which rolls along with the walking Theseus until he reaches the Minotaur. Theseus, after killing the Minotaur, finds his way back through the tortuous Labyrinth by rolling up the thread again. Then Theseus and the fourteen go back to Athens. Theseus takes Ariadne with him, but leaves her on an island before reaching Athens.

Why do I tell you all this? Because the very beginning of Plato's dialogue entitled *Phaedo* refers to these fabulous events. The dialogue consists of a conversation held in Phlius, a city in the Peloponnese, between Echecrates, a citizen of Phlius, and Phaedo, who is not an Athenian either. Echecrates wants to know what Socrates said before he died and how he died. Echecrates has heard that a long time elapsed between the conviction of Socrates and his execution. He does not know why this was so, and Phaedo tells him why. The Athenians, he recounts, had made a vow to Apollo—so it is said—that they would send a mission every year to Apollo's temple in Delos, if Theseus and (58 a 11) "those twice seven" whom he took with him were saved. That's what the Athenians have done ever since. And (58 b 5–c 1) "it is their law that, after the mission begins, the city must be pure and no one may be publicly executed until the ship has gone to Delos and back; and sometimes, when contrary winds detain it, this takes a long time." The ship had left on the day before the trial of Socrates (58 a and c). "That's why Socrates passed a long time in prison between his trial and his death" (58 c 4–5). Answering Echecrates' questions, Phaedo tells him which of Socrates' friends were with him on his last day. Watch, please, how Phaedo does that in the dialogue circumspectly and

precisely (59 b–c). He says: "Of natives [that is, of native Athenians] there was this Apollodorus [Phaedo had mentioned him just before] and Cristobulus and his father Crito and also Hermogenes and Epigenes and Aeschines and Antisthenes [these are seven], and Ctesippus of the deme of Paeania *was there too*, and Menexenus and some other natives [two more names are thus conspicuously added and some people that remain unnamed]." And Phaedo continues: "But Plato, I think, was ill." "Were any non-Athenians there?" asks Echecrates. And Phaedo replies: "Yes, Simmias of Thebes as well as Cebes and Phaedonides and from Megara Euclides and Terpsion" (that is to say, five). To make sure that we realize the importance of all this naming, Plato, who was not there, makes Echecrates ask whether Aristippus and Cleombrotus were present. No, says Phaedo, they were not. Echecrates: "Was anyone else there?" Phaedo: "I think these were about all." It is thus established that fourteen people, whose names are given, namely nine Athenians and five non-Athenians, were present plus some unnamed Athenian men. Can we remain unaware of the fact that these correspond to the nine young men, the five young women and the crew that Theseus took with him on his voyage to Crete? The two young men who are conspicuously added in Phaedo's report to the seven first named, namely Ctesippus and Menexenus, have indeed an eager and manly spirit, as we can see when reading Plato's dialogue entitled *Lysis*. But what about Phaedo, the non-Athenian, who supposedly was also present at the last day of Socrates? Well, let us hear what Phaedo says himself about his relation to Socrates. At one point, he says (89 b), Socrates "stroked my head and gathered the hair on the back of my neck into his hand—he had a habit of playing with my hair on occasion . . . ." And a little later on (89 c) he compares the relation between himself and Socrates with the relation between Iolaus and Heracles. Iolaus is the nephew, the charioteer, and the beloved comrade of Heracles. And let us not forget: the thread of Phaedo's narrative in the dialogue goes through a labyrinth of questions and arguments. Can we fail to see that Phaedo corresponds to Ariadne of the ancient tale? Can we remain unaware of the fact that the dialogue does not give a so-called "historical" account of Socrates' death, but gives a mythical presentation of that crucial event, which however is truer than the tale about Theseus

and the Minotaur, accepted as true by the average Athenian? In the dialogue the new and *true* Theseus is *Socrates* and the old and *true* Minotaur is the monster called *Fear of Death.* But while the Minotaur was, according to Euripides (Plutarch's *Lives*, Theseus XV, 2), "a commingled look and a monstrous babe," in which "two different natures, bull and man, were joined," in Fear of Death an awesome pain of the soul, namely fear, is joined to death, which is but a hobgoblin or a bugbear, as Cebes later in the dialogue (77 e) intimates. Let us not forget for a moment that the dialogue is a δρᾶμα presenting a Platonic myth. Athenaeus, a writer of the second century A.D., who today would be called a "literary critic," composed a lengthy work named "The Sophists at Dinner," the content of which is mostly inimical gossip. But it is worth noting that Athenaeus makes Phaedo state (XI, 505 e) that he never said or heard what he is supposed to have said or heard in the dialogue named after him. Indeed, what is happening in the dialogue is *invented* by Plato. It is thus that Plato makes us see Socrates' struggle with the Fear of Death. How does he do that? Let us watch.

I

When Socrates' friends enter the room in the prison, where Socrates had been staying all the time, they find him just released from his fetters and his wife Xanthippe sitting with one of their little sons beside him. Xanthippe is crying and Socrates asks Crito to let somebody take her home. Socrates sits up on his couch, bends his leg and rubs it with his hand. The Greek word which I translated with the word "bend" is συγκάμπτειν. It can be used to describe the bent position of a foetus in the womb. Since Socrates' rubbing of his leg gives him some *pleasure*, he contrasts this pleasure with the *pain* that the fetters had produced and goes on—calmly and playfully—to imagine how Aesop could have composed a fable about pleasure and pain fastened together by their heads so that they could never be completely separated. Phaedo had mentioned before that he had been overcome by a strange mixture of pain and pleasure at the thought of Socrates' impending death and the anticipation of the thoughtful and exciting discussion that was bound to occur in

the prison, as it had occurred on previous days. Socrates' mentioning of Aesop reminds Cebes of what Socrates had been doing in his prison days, namely putting Aesop's fables into verse and composing a song to Apollo. Cebes asks why Socrates, who had never done that kind of thing before, should be doing that now. The poet Evenus had asked Cebes this question a few days previously. Socrates answers that he kept having dreams in his former life in which he was always told the same thing: "engage in the Muses' art and work at it" (μουσικὴν ποίει καὶ ἐργάζου). He had been interpreting this saying as encouraging him to do what he always had been doing, namely philosophizing, since he understood philosophy to be the greatest art of the Muses. Now, however, while the festival of Apollo delayed his execution, he considered the possibility that the dream might have meant what is usually understood to be the Muses' art (μουσική) and he decided not to disobey the dream, but to compose verses. And Phaedo makes Socrates say that *not* being a poet, that is, a man who invents myths, he turned to the fables of Aesop and put the first ones he came upon into verse. Can we forget the many myths that Plato makes Socrates invent in his dialogues? Socrates concludes his answer by begging Cebes to bid Evenus farewell and to tell him that he should follow Socrates as quickly as he can. Simmias intervenes and claims that Evenus certainly would not take Socrates' advice. Whereupon Socrates: "Is not Evenus a philosopher?" "I think so," says Simmias. Then Evenus will be willing to do so, says Socrates, as any one would be who has a worthy share in philosophy. But Socrates adds something to this statement, and while doing so puts his feet down on the ground. What he adds is this: "Perhaps he [that is, Evenus] will not take his own life, for they say that is not permitted." The ensuing conversation is about this addition. How can Socrates claim that philosophers desire to die, while asserting at the same time that it is not permitted to take one's own life? This assertion refers to what Philolaus — and also other people — have been saying. It is necessary at this point to note that the background of the *entire* dialogue is "Pythagorean" and "orphic." A Pythagorean brotherhood is known to have resided in Phlius, where Phaedo talks to Echecrates. Philolaus is the founder of a similar brotherhood in Thebes, to which Cebes and Simmias apparently belonged. The assertion that it is not permitted to

take one's own life is—as Socrates intimates (62 b)—a part of an esoteric doctrine of the Pythagoreans, according to which men live in a kind of enclosure, namely the body, and ought not to set themselves free and run away. And in the light of this doctrine Phaedo makes Socrates claim that men are one of the chattels of the gods, who are their guardians, and that the gods would be angry if a man escaped by killing himself. This claim of Socrates forces Cebes and Simmias to wonder why Socrates is so much willing to leave them and the gods by wishing to die. This wonder amounts to an accusation, and Socrates declares that he has to *defend* himself as if he were in a court of law. What follows can, therefore, be called Socrates' "Defense," an ἀπολογία indeed, unlike his alleged "defense" in the dialogue called in a dissembling way "Apology."

Before beginning his defense, Phaedo narrates, Socrates has to listen to Crito, the point being that the man who will administer the poison has asked Crito to warn Socrates to talk as little as possible, lest the effects of the poison be diminished so that it would have to be administered again and again. Socrates does not pay any attention to this warning and proceeds to his lengthy defense.

It consists in claiming that a lover of wisdom, a "philosopher," in pursuing philosophy practices nothing but dying and being dead (64 a). Simmias can't help laughing—though reluctantly—because he thinks of the many in Thebes who would also say what Socrates just said and would add to it that the philosophers do indeed deserve nothing but death. They would be right, says Socrates, although they would not understand their own saying. What the philosopher wants above all is to let the soul alone, itself by itself, consider that which truly is, without being troubled by the body, the bodily sensing, the bodily desires and fears, the bodily pleasures and pains. What truly *is* cannot be seen or heard or sensed in any way. Now, since death is the separation of the soul from the body, as Phaedo makes Socrates say (64 c, 66 e–67 a), the philosophers must obviously desire death, that is, the complete purification of the soul. And Phaedo makes Socrates refer to orphic sayings according to which the thyrsus-bearers are many, but the initiated and purified are few,

and only these few will dwell "over there" with the gods. This is the gist of Socrates' "defense."

II

Quite naturally the question arises whether the soul, when it leaves the body, still exists. Does it not perish altogether? That is the question Cebes immediately raises, and this is the way Socrates answers it, according to Phaedo's narrative.

There is an ancient argument, an "orphic" one, we have to understand, that we go there from here and come back here again and thus are born from the dead (70 c). If this is so, our soul must exist there. And Socrates proceeds, according to Phaedo, to show in a detailed way how that argument might be true. He invites Cebes to consider that in this visible world of ours everything, if there is something *opposite* to it, inevitably comes into being *from* this opposite. He cites examples: the greater becomes greater after having been smaller and vice versa, the weaker is generated from the stronger and vice versa, the slower from the quicker, the worse from the better, the more just from the more unjust, being cooler from being hotter, being awake from being asleep, and so on, and so on. The opposite of living is being dead. It follows that all living things, and that means also all living people, are generated from the dead. Then, Socrates concludes, our souls *do* exist in Hades, and there is such a thing as "coming to life again" (ἀναβιώσκεσθαι – 71 e–72 a). If that were not so, all things would be swallowed up in death.

III

We may have some doubts about the soundness of this orphic argument, as Cebes apparently has; for he reminds Socrates of another way to show the pre-existence of our souls. As Socrates so often says (we have to assume not only in Platonic dialogues), learning is nothing else but recollection (ἀνάμνησις), and that implies that the soul must already have existed somewhere before it came into being in human bodies, so that in this way also

the soul appears to be deathless. Simmias wants to learn — that is, to recollect — more about this argument, and Socrates goes on showing — again in a most detailed way — the different cases of recollecting which we experience, up to the case of recollecting *equality itself* (74 a ff.). What is important about this case is that we can never see, never sense "equality itself." We perceive through our senses equal things, stones or pieces of wood, for example. We realize, however, that the quality of two visibly equal things is a deficient one: these things may appear to one man equal and to another unequal. To be able to recognize this deficiency means that we must have previously known perfect equality. And it is this previous, but forgotten knowledge that we *recollect* when, in perceiving visibly equal things, we realize that their equality is merely an approximation, a copy, an "image" of perfect equality, of "the equal itself." We must have acquired that knowledge of perfect equality, Socrates submits (75 c), before we were born. And that applies not only to equality, but to any intelligible entity on which we put the seal of "its being what it is" (αὐτὸ ὃ ἔστι). Thus there is the same necessity for our soul to exist before our birth and for all intelligibles, all νοητά, to have being. We have to note that the necessity of asserting the soul's pre-existence is understood here, in the dialogue, to *depend* on the presupposed being of the intelligibles, the νοητά, the ἴδη, the "invisible looks."

Simmias and Cebes now agree that the soul must have existed before our birth. But what has not been proved, they both assert, is that the soul also exists *after* we are dead. Socrates claims that that proof had already been given, referring to the previous orphic argument that every living being is born from the dead. Must not the soul exist after we die, since it must be born again? But Socrates also agrees that the discussion has to proceed. There is some jesting about the possibility that the soul might be blown away by a high wind after we die, and Cebes says that there is perhaps a child within us who has such a fear. This is the moment when he mentions the need to pursuade that child "not to fear death as if it were a hobgoblin." What is required for that child, says Socrates playfully and truthfully, are daily incantations until that fear is charmed away (77 e). And the struggle with Fear of Death continues.

IV

The emphasis is now on the distinction between what is compounded and what is uncompounded. The compounded is liable to be decomposed, which cannot be said of the uncompounded. That which is uniquely "itself by itself," like "Equality itself," "Beauty itself," "Being itself," "Man himself," "Horse itself," is compounded and always the same, while there are things like men, horses, cloaks, that are constantly changing. What is mentioned first, the εἴδη, the "looks," are only reachable in thought, are *invisible*, while what is mentioned later is perceived by our senses, is *visible*. And Socrates asks Cebes forcefully (79 a): "Are you willing then to posit two kinds of beings, one visible, the other invisible [ἀϊδές]?" Cebes is willing. He is willing to admit that the visible is constantly changing and that the invisible is always the same. It is clear to him that the body belongs to the visible and the soul to the invisible. He has to agree that when the soul makes use of the body for any inquiry, that is, makes use of the senses, it is dragged to the things which never remain the same, but when the soul inquires alone by itself, it departs into the realm of the pure, the everlasting, the deathless and the changeless (79 d). And Cebes also agrees that, when a man dies, the soul, the invisible (ἀϊδές), goes to a place which is, like itself, noble and pure and invisible, goes to the true Hades (Ἅιδης), to the good and wise god. And Socrates concludes that the soul departs in purity, if it never associated itself with the body in life but gathered itself into itself alone, that is to say, philosophized in the right way and willingly practiced dying. If it did that, it will be happy in Hades and henceforward live there, as the initiated say, truly with the gods. Socrates continues in this Pythagorean-orphic vein, describing what happens to the soul of a man devoted to bodily desires and pleasures after this man dies. His soul is dragged back to the visible world, through fear of the ἀϊδές and of Ἅιδης, flits about monuments and tombs, passes into the body of an ass or a wolf or a hawk or a kite. The souls of better men, who by habit and practice, without philosophy and true understanding, have lived moderately and justly, pass into the bodies of bees or wasps or ants or of men again. It is only true philosophizing that attempts

to free the soul from the prison of the body, from the bondage to pleasure and pain. Only a soul nurtured in this way is not going to fear that it will be destroyed at its departure from the body and vanish into nothingness (80 d–84 b). The soul is entirely indissoluble, "or nearly so" (80 b 10: ἢ ἐγγύς τι τούτου).

V

There is a long silence after Socrates' speech. But finally Socrates addresses Cebes and Simmias, who had talked to each other, and asks them whether they had any doubts about what had been said. Simmias confirms that they are doubtful, have questions to ask, but hesitate to trouble Socrates in his last hours. Socrates laughs gently, Phaedo narrates, compares himself to the swans that sing most and best when they feel that they are about to die, and urges Simmias and Cebes to speak up and to ask whatever questions they have. Simmias and Cebes comply.

The question of Simmias is this: Is not what Socrates had said about the body and the soul comparable to what could be said about the well attuned strings of a lyre and the concord of sounds produced by those strings? If the lyre is destroyed, could it be claimed that the concord will still exist?

The question of Cebes is this: Granted that the soul survives when a man dies and even wears out many bodies, might it not *finally* perish altogether in one of its deaths?

These questions, as narrated by Phaedo, are asked in a most serious and circumstantial way. Not only are all the people, who are said to surround Socrates, deeply troubled, but this is also true of Echecrates, Phaedo's interlocutor. It is not unimportant to note what Phaedo has to say at this point. What astonished him most, he says, was "first the pleasant, kind and respectful manner in which he [Socrates] accepted the arguments of the young men; secondly, his quick sense of the effect their words had upon us; and finally, how well he cured us . . . ." (89 a) This is the moment when Socrates' habit of playing with Phaedo's hair is mentioned by Phaedo. Socrates is doing that right now, while telling Phaedo to cut his beautiful hair—not the next day, but this very day, as Socrates will also do, if his argument dies and cannot be brought to life again. This is the moment when

Iolaus' relation to Heracles is compared to that of Phaedo to Socrates. But this is also the moment when Socrates launches into a lengthy discussion about the danger of becoming misologists, haters of argument, and of believing that there is no soundness in arguments at all (89 c–91 c). Let us note that this discussion is at the very middle of Phaedo's narrative. We have to infer that nothing is more important to Socrates than to keep arguing about a difficult question, never to despair, never to give up the hope of reaching a final and sound conclusion. And after finishing the discussion about misology Socrates takes up the question raised by both Simmias and Cebes.

VI

The doubts and fears of Simmias that the soul may perish first, being a kind of concord, are dealt with by Socrates first. (Let me remark parenthetically that the word "concord" translates the Greek word ἁρμονία, which it is wrong to translate by the English word "harmony.") Socrates makes sure that Simmias accepts, as Cebes does too, the argument according to which learning is recollection and that, therefore, he also agrees that the soul must have existed somewhere before it was imprisoned in the body. But a concord of sounds cannot exist before the lyre and its strings come into being. The concord of sounds is the last to come into being. There is no consonance then between the recollection argument and the argument that the soul might be something like a concord of sounds. Simmias is ready to yield. But Socrates goes on demolishing the concord thesis by reasons which are quite independent of the recollection argument. He shows that concords of sounds can be more or less concordant, while souls cannot be more or less souls. On the other hand, a soul may possess sense and virtue and be good, while another soul may be foolish and wicked. Those who claim that the soul is comparable to a concord of sounds will have to claim that the virtue of a soul is another concord and the wickedness of a soul is a discord of a concord. Or, to say it better, if the soul is a concord, it cannot be discordant, cannot be wicked at all. And finally Socrates points to our experience that the soul, if it is thoughtful, rules over its desires and passions and fears,

which it could not do if it were like a concord, since that which is concordant depends on its concordant parts and does not rule over them. Does not Homer say of Odysseus (*Odyssey* XX, 17 f.): "He smote his breast, and thus rebuked his heart: endure, my heart; a worse thing even than this didst thou once endure"? Phaedo makes Socrates say judiciously and probably smilingly that Homer could not have said that, if he had thought of the soul as a concord. This is how the concord theme of Simmias, the Theban, is brought to an end. And Socrates proceeds to meet the doubt of the other Theban, Cebes. Before doing that he appeals, solemnly and playfully, to the graces of the Theban goddess Harmonia, who is the daughter of Ares and Aphrodite, as well as to the graces of Cadmus, who is Harmonia's husband and who, according to the legend, killed that great serpent, out of whose teeth armed men sprang up, clashing their weapons together.

VII

To meet the doubt of Cebes is the most difficult task Socrates faces. According to Phaedo, you will remember, Cebes had insisted on the possibility that the soul, after wearing out many bodies, might *finally* perish altogether. In doing that, he had, in fact, relied on Socrates' own saying that the soul is entirely indissoluble "or nearly so." What can the phrase "nearly so" mean but final dissolution! Socrates pauses for awhile, considering something deeply by himself. And then the struggle with Fear of Death reaches its height.

Socrates has to show *why* the soul can never die. Before doing this, he has to make clear the meaning of the word "why." The question "why" comes up whenever we are unable to understand something in our immediate experience. We are asking what is "responsible" for this something, what "causes" it. A crucial distinction is made by Socrates (99 a–b): "One thing is what is truly responsible [for something], another thing is that without which what is responsible could not possibly become [effectively] responsible." To be unable to make that distinction is a sign of "profound sluggishness" in speaking and thinking. To say, for example, the causes of Socrates' sitting in the prison

on his couch with his feet on the ground are these, that his body is composed of bones and sinews and that the bones hang loose in their ligaments while the sinews, by relaxing and contracting, make him bend his limbs—to say that is to fail to mention the true causes of Socrates' sitting in the prison room, namely that the *Athenians* decided that it was best to condemn him and that *he* decided that it was right for him to stay and undergo whatever penalty they would order (98 c–e). The confusion about the meaning of "cause" (αἰτία) leads to that special wisdom known by the name of "inquiry about nature" (περὶ φύσεως ἱστορία—96 a 8). In his youth, Socrates reports in Phaedo's narrative, he wanted very much to find out, with regard to any single thing or occurrence, what was responsible for its coming into being, its passing away, its being the way it was (96 a). But he could not find any satisfactory answers. Nor could he learn them from anybody else, not even from the great Anaxagoras. The cause of this inability was precisely the confusion about the meaning of "cause." Socrates had to embark upon a different journey, his "next best try," which means he had to take to the oars, since the wind had failed, and seek to find out in a better way "why" things are as they are. He had to "take refuge in the spoken word" (99 e 5), in exchanging questions and answers with himself and with others and in *them* search for the truth of things.

Socrates gives the following outline of the way he now proceeds. On each occasion he chooses as a supposition (an ὑπόθεσις) the most reliable statement which would make us understand what remains obscure and concealed in our immediate experience. Whatever appears to be consonant with that statement is to be posited as genuinely true, and that applies especially to what is being said about the "cause" of something; whatever does not conform to the statement is to be taken as untrue.

Cebes does not quite follow. He is not saying anything new, Socrates explains, but rather what he has never stopped saying, at other times as well as in the preceding discussion. And now again he is going to revert to those much babbled-about words and make them his starting point, his initial supposition being that there *is* something named "itself by itself beautiful" and also something "itself by itself good" and something "itself by

itself big" and all the rest. Consonant with this statement is a further one of the following type: If there be anything beautiful besides Beauty itself, it will be beautiful for no other reason than that it *shares in*, or *partakes of*, Beauty itself. It is this kind of *cause* which is responsible for things being beautiful, which "makes" them beautiful. Statements of this type provide the safest answer to the question: *Why* are things as they are? In a dissembling and yet truthful way Socrates characterizes this way of understanding why things are as they are as "simple," "artless," and "perhaps foolish." His answer, with all its safety, is a simple-minded, "unlearned" one, as he later adds. Its safety is based entirely on the reliability of the underlying statement that the "intelligibles," the νοητά, have being. Everybody present—and also Echecrates who listens to Phaedo's story—agrees. And then Socrates proceeds to show *why* the soul can never die.

The "demonstration" he offers, according to Phaedo's narrative, resembles indeed a most intricate maze. It is ultimately based, first, on the underlying and most reliable statement that each of the intelligibles, each of the εἴδη, is something which has *being*; secondly, on its corollary that everything else, by "sharing in" those εἴδη, derives its *name* from them; and thirdly, on the kindred corollary that this sharing in the various εἴδη can be safely understood as the "cause" for everything being as it is.

Socrates takes care to remark that the two ways of proceeding in all this, the one towards *consequences* which spring from the safe supposition and the other towards the very *source* of the safe supposition, the way downwards and the way upwards, should not be mixed up. But we cannot fail to observe that in Phaedo's narrative these two ways do get mixed up. It is noteworthy, for instance, that what remains shrouded in darkness is whether the way to the "true Hades" is downwards or upwards.

A long series of examples of true causation is presented by Socrates. I shall mention only a few. A man is big, and is called big and not small, because of his sharing in Bigness or, as we may say, because Bigness is "in" him; a body is hot, and is called hot and not cold, because it contains Heat; a body is sick, and is called sick and not healthy, because Sickness is "in" it; a number of things is odd, and is called odd and not even, because these things share in Oddness. And now Socrates adds: a hot

body may cool off and then again become hot, but the Heat "in" it can never become cold nor the Cold "in" it ever become hot. For Heat and Cold, just as Bigness and Smallness, are *by themselves* incompatible with each other.

Somebody among those present interjects full of surprise: What is being said now is opposite to what was said before about opposites, to wit, that the greater is generated from the less and the less from the greater, and that *is* simply the way opposites are generated, namely from opposites. And now it is being said that that can never happen! Socrates listens attentively and then explains: What was said before was said about visible things in this visible world of ours, but now the talk is about intelligibles, about the opposites as they are in themselves, about the εἴδη like Bigness itself, Heat itself, Sickness itself, Oddness itself. But at this point Socrates begins to complicate his simple-minded account of how causation has to be understood by another safe and "more ingenious" (105 c 2) way of answering the question why things are as they are.

VIII

A body is hot not only because of the Heat "in" it, but also because of *fire*; a body is sick not only because of Sickness "in" it, but also because of *fever*; a number of things will be an odd number of things not only because of Oddness "in" it, but also because of the *unit* which makes an odd number odd; and *soul* is going to join the rank of these new entities as a cause of life. What characterizes these new entities? First, their names are entirely different from the names of what they are causes of: fire–hot, fever–sick, unit–odd, soul–life; secondly, these entities are *not* intelligibles, are *not* εἴδη. "Fire" and "fever" have an elemental character. The mode of being of "unit" is highly debatable. And even more so is the mode of being of "soul." Up to this moment in Phaedo's narrative what characterized the soul was its thoughtfulness, its φρόνησις, its ability to deal with intelligibles, the νοητά, the εἴδη, its power to think, to learn, to recollect. Socrates proposes to Cebes twice that they determine what sort of entities these newly introduced ones are. What is said of them is this: the new entities, while not accepting *one*

of two opposites, "bring up" the *other* opposite and impose it on what they approach. Thus Cebes, imitating Socrates' "more ingenious" way, claims that soul, ψυχή, entering a body, will make it a living body (ζῶν). The simple-minded account would have been that Life (ζωή) does that. The account of Cebes follows the pattern set by Socrates: the opposite of Life is Death (105 d 6–9); soul (ψυχή), by itself not "opposed" to Death, "brings up" Death's opposite, Life (105 d 10–11), brings Life to whatever it "occupies"; and since, in analogy to Socrates' examples, "soul" does not "accept" Life's opposite, does not "accept" Death, "soul" cannot be touched by Death; the soul, therefore, will never "die." The demonstration seems to have reached its end.

But Socrates immediately presents the difficulty which is bound to come up. The entities, the "sharing" in which is responsible for certain features of the visible world (according to the simple-minded and the new account) — as well as those sensible features themselves — carry, by virtue of their *not* "accepting" one of the opposites in question, a negative appellation, for instance, "not even" (ἀνάρτιον), "not just" (ἄδικον), "deathless" (ἀθάνατον). But these negatives do not tell whether that which they signify "departs" or vanishes altogether whenever the negated opposite approaches. This alternative is mentioned in Phaedo's narrative repeatedly and well in advance of the final conclusion: the *one* opposite *either* escapes, retires, withdraws, goes away *or* perishes at the approach of the *other* opposite. Could not the same be true of "soul"? That is Socrates' query. As something to which the appellation "deathless" applies, it might nevertheless share this same fate: it could be "extinguished" and perish at the approach of Death. It would be a "living" soul only *as long* as it exists in a body and no longer. The demonstration, with which Cebes was satisfied (105 e 9), amounts to nothing if one considers that possibility.

It is Cebes who dismisses it. He asks: Does not the deathless *mean* that which never dies? And must not that which never dies exist forever? If the "deathless" were subject to destruction, Cebes exclaims in an orphic vein, could there be anything else that would escape it! Whereupon Socrates (106 d 5–7): "The god, at least, life itself by itself [αὐτὸ τὸ τῆς ζωῆς εἶδος], and if there be anything else 'deathless'—that these never perish might, I think, be agreed upon by all." There is as much am-

biguity as solemnity in these words. Cebes catches the irony and chimes in (106 d 8–9): "By all men, to be sure, Zeus knows, and even more so by the gods as I, for my part, suppose." But Socrates and Cebes do agree on this: since "soul" does not "accept" Death and *if* thus the soul is indeed deathless, there could be no alternative to its being indestructible; when Death approaches man, what is mortal about him dies, while what is "deathless," retiring before Death, departs safe and unimpaired (106 e 7). "Soul, then, Cebes," Socrates concludes in Phaedo's narrative, "is more than anything deathless and indestructible, and our souls will truly be in Hades" (106 e 9–107 a 1). Let us note that what the word "soul" now means remains unstated. Nor are we told what kind of place "Hades" is.

IX

Cebes and Simmias are satisfied. But Simmias feels bound to make a reservation: considering the human weakness (ἡ ἀνθρωπίνη ἀσθένεια—107 b 1) as against the magnitude of the subject under discussion, he for one cannot completely trust the argument. Socrates fully approves of Simmias' standard and even extends the distrust (ἀπιστία) to the very first suppositions underlying the entire argument. The inconclusiveness of the "demonstration" hinges on Cebes' imitating Socrates' "more ingenious" accounts. The assertion that sharing in "soul," in ψυχή, is responsible for Life, ζωή, in a body, that "soul" is thus "life-bringing," is rooted in the common identification of "living being" and "animate being," of ζῶον and ἔμψυχον. The emphasis in the preceding discussion lay on the kinship between soul and the intelligible. What characterized soul was φρόνησις, thoughtfulness, and all that this entails. Cebes' "imitating" answer gives ψυχή a radically different meaning, relating it not to φρόνησις, but to "living," to ζῆν. The indestructibility of this soul, as the exchange between Cebes and Socrates shows, and as Simmias confirms, is far from certain.

Does all this mean that the argument, intended to cast away Cebes's doubt and built up with so much care and circumspection, does not fulfill its task? Taken by itself, it fails indeed. But had not Socrates said (77 e 8–9), playfully and truthfully, that

daily incantations are required to charm the fear of death away? Are not *all* the arguments of the dialogue a series of such incantations? But will they not, and necessarily so, remain ineffective unless supported by evidence more powerful than the evidence they are able to supply by themselves? This supporting evidence is there, in the very δρᾶμα presented by Phaedo. We witness Socrates' behavior during the long hours before he drinks the draught. For it is not only the content of the arguments, their cogency and insufficiency, that mark the struggle with Fear of Death, it is also, *and more so*, the adult sobriety, the serenity in gravity and jest, imposed by Socrates on the conversation. The final story Socrates is telling, according to Phaedo's narrative, shows perhaps more than anything else Socrates' imperturbable calm. He reverts to the kind of journey he claims to have undertaken in his youth. He describes our earth, not as we see it, but as it would appear to us if we were looking at it from above and from within. The story, a long and complex one, is told in complete tranquility and—we have to assume—with recurrent smiles. It presents not so much an "inquiry about nature" (περὶ φύσεως ἱστορία) as an "inquiry about the soul" (περὶ ψυχῆς ἱστορία). It tells what happens to the souls of men after death. Socrates does not pretend that his story is a true one, and that's why he probably keeps smiling: "It would not be fitting for a man of sense to maintain that all this is just as I have described it" (114 d 1–2). But since the soul appears to be deathless, a man of sense should take the risk to accept a tale like the one Socrates was telling. "For it is a noble risk" (114 d 6). And one should *continue* to charm oneself in this very way.

X

After finishing this story, Phaedo reports, Socrates is about to go to take a bath. Crito intervenes again. He asks what Socrates wants his friends to do about his children and about anything else, notably his burial. He has nothing to say about all that, says Socrates and, quietly laughing, he explains to his friends that it is difficult to persuade Crito that burying the body, which will remain when he, Socrates, is gone, has nothing to

do with him. He will have departed. He then goes into another room to bathe. When he returns, his three children and the women of his family appear. He talks with them, gives them his advice, and then tells them to leave. The sun is setting, the drinking of the poison is near. Phaedo reports a touching scene between Socrates and one of the wardens of the prison. Socrates demands that the poison be brought to him. Crito tries to persuade Socrates to wait a little longer. Socrates says that that would be ridiculous. The poison is brought in a cup. Socrates is told to drink and then to walk till his legs feel heavy. Socrates asks whether he should not pour a libation to a deity. It is hard not to sense the irony of this question. Socrates is told that there is not enough for that in the cup. Socrates prays that his departure from here to there be a fortunate one. And he drinks the poison coolly and calmly.

An outburst of fierce emotions and of tears and of wailing among Socrates' friends follows. Socrates says to them: "Keep quiet and be steadfast" (117 e 2). He lies down on his back, and the man who administered the poison as well as Socrates' friends watch death approaching. Uncovering his face, which had been covered, Socrates says to Crito: "We owe a cock to Asclepius; pay this debt and do not neglect it" (118 a 7–8). These are his last words. To sacrifice to Asclepius, the healing god, means to thank him for one's recovery from a disease. Socrates' last words imply that he is recovering from the most disastrous disease, the one that imprisons his soul in his body. He is recovering from this disease because his soul is leaving its prison. Crito closes Socrates' mouth and eyes. And Phaedo ends his narrative by telling Echecrates that this was the end of the best, of the most thoughtful and most just man of his time.

What shall *we* conclude from all that we have heard? Three things. First, in the struggle we have been witnessing, Socrates, the true Theseus, annihilates the true Minotaur, the Fear of Death. Secondly, it remains completely uncertain whether Socrates' soul is now in the true Hades, the realm of the invisible looks. Thirdly, it *is* certain that *Plato*, through Phaedo's narrative, has made Socrates live forever—or, to be as cautious as possible, has made Socrates live as long as people will be able to read what Plato wrote.